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## ARE THE EFFECTS OF BAUMRIND'S PARENTING STYLES CULTURALLY SPECIFIC OR CULTURALLY EQUIVALENT?

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Baumrind's authoritative model has had a profound impact on the direction of parenting research. Research has found that European American children with authoritative parents are more competent, better adjusted emotionally, higher achieving, and less likely to use illicit drugs or engage in other risky behaviors compared with those with nonauthoritative parents (Baumrind, 1991b; Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). However, whether the typology accurately describes non-European American styles of parenting is not clear. Baumrind's primary sample was almost exclusively high-functioning two-parent middle-class European American families, which leaves open the possibility that the authoritative model is applicable only to such families. Furthermore, the earliest studies of parenting styles that included diverse samples found inconsistent results for non-European Americans (e.g., Baumrind, 1972; Dornbusch, Ritter, Leiderman, Roberts, & Fraleigh, 1987). This led some researchers to argue that the effects of parenting depend on

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the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs (Chao, 2001; Mandara & Murray, 2002). Other researchers however, maintained that the authoritative model is essentially a universally optimal style of parenting that is applicable across cultural and social contexts (Lamborn & Felbab, 2003). The purpose of this chapter is to review the research and theories on the cultural differences in the nature and effects of parenting styles in order to draw empirically supported conclusions about the applicability of the authoritative model for non-European American youths.

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN EARLY PARENTING STYLES RESEARCH

In an early study, Baumrind (1972) found that African American parents were higher on firm enforcement and did not encourage individuality in their preschool-age girls to the same degree as European American parents. They also expected their girls to be more mature. In fact, about 50% of the African American parents and only 13% of the European American parents were classified as authoritarian. The main finding was that these authoritarian practices affected the groups differently. In spite of their relatively authoritarian parents, the African American girls were rated as more assertive and independent than the European American girls. Baumrind (1972) argued that the girls may have perceived their parents as nurturing, not rejecting, and sufficiently identified with their strong mothers to emulate them.

Dornbusch et al. (1987) were the first to test the applicability of Baumrind's parenting styles model in a large culturally diverse sample of youths. They used self-report surveys and found that European Americans were lower on the authoritarian and higher on the authoritative measures than Asian, Latino, or African Americans. They also found that their measures of parenting were differentially related to each group's self-reported grade-point average (GPA). In general, for all the ethnic groups, the higher adolescents rated their parents on authoritarian parenting, the lower their GPA. However, the size of the authoritarian effect on self-reported GPA was largest for European Americans and smallest for African Americans. They also found that the authoritative measure was not significantly related to GPA for any group but European Americans.

Building on these findings, Steinberg, Mounts, Lamborn, and Dornbusch (1991) specifically tested the possibility that the authoritative model may not be effective for youths in different social contexts. They assessed 10,000 ethnically and economically diverse high school students from California and Wisconsin on self-report measures of parental warmth, monitoring, and psychological autonomy. They then classified the parents as authoritative if they scored

above the sample median on all three parenting measures. The remaining parents were considered nonauthoritative. They divided the sample according to ethnicity (Asian, African, Latino, and European Americans), whether the family was working class or middle class, and whether the adolescents lived in single- or two-parent homes. The researchers compared adolescents with authoritative and nonauthoritative parents within each of the 16 groups on indicators of adolescent adjustment. As with the Dornbusch et al. (1987) study, two-parent middle-class European American families were most likely to be authoritative, whereas working class African, Hispanic, and especially Asian American parents were least likely.

When Dornbusch et al. (1991) assessed the effects of authoritative parenting on the outcomes, they found that children with authoritative parents tended to have higher GPAs, were more self-reliant, and were lower in psychological distress and delinquency than those with nonauthoritative parents. Although the effect sizes varied across the 16 ecological niches, the pattern was generally the same for each subgroup. The main differences were that authoritativeness did not predict any outcomes for two-parent working-class African Americans and failed to predict GPA differences for single-parent working-class Asian Americans. However, the reliability of those specific findings is questionable because there were only 11 authoritative African American and four authoritative Asian American parents available for those comparisons. Thus, the authors concluded from their most reliable findings that adolescents with authoritative parents were overall better adjusted, regardless of their ethnic group.

In a follow-up study (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991), the same team examined the effects of parenting styles in more detail. Instead of simply comparing authoritative versus nonauthoritative, they classified the parents from the Steinberg et al. (1991) study into one of the four parenting style categories (authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and neglectful). To do so, they assessed each adolescent on the degree to which their parents were accepting/involved and strict/supervisory. They then classified parents into one of the four categories on the basis of their scoring in the upper or lower tertile of the acceptance or strictness measures, which left slightly more than 4,000 adolescents for the study. Adolescents with authoritative parents were found to be most adjusted across measures of school competence, psychosocial development, and problem behaviors. Furthermore, the effects of parenting style did not differ statistically by ethnic group, parental education, or adolescent gender.

The researchers assessed the youths 1 year later with the same instruments and classification methods (Steinberg, Lamborn, Darling, Mounts, & Dornbusch, 1994). After attrition and application of their classification method, the sample comprised 2,300 adolescents. They found that the advantages of the adolescents with authoritative parents either maintained or increased over the

year. The authors concluded again that the authoritative model is the optimal form of parenting for most measures of adolescent outcomes.

One of the major findings in the prior studies was the interesting difference that Asian American youths were much less likely to have authoritative parents than European American youths, even though the Asian American adolescents' academic achievement was equal to or higher than all other groups. The effects of parenting style on academic achievement were less robust for African American adolescents overall. To better understand this difference, the research team assessed the degree to which peer networks influence the parenting style effects (reviewed in Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). They found that the relative influence of parenting styles was much stronger for European American adolescents than for other youths, and peers had a greater influence on achievement for Asian American and African American adolescents. They further concluded that the high peer support for achievement helps Asian American youths overcome high levels of authoritarianism among their parents. For African American youths, the negative effects of low peer support for achievement seemed to counteract the potentially positive effects of authoritative parenting. Thus, the researchers concluded their work with these data sets by arguing that when it comes to behavior and mental health outcomes, authoritative parenting is optimal for all youths, but when it comes to academic achievement, the effects of parenting styles seem to depend on the social context in which youths must navigate.

### CULTURAL SPECIFICITY PERSPECTIVE

The cultural specificity perspective in socialization was first introduced by Baumrind (1972; also see Baumrind et al., 2010), who argued that the parenting styles she identified with her sample of European American families cannot be extended to explain the parenting styles and associated outcomes of other ethnic groups. Baumrind (1972) reported exploratory data with a small sample of African American families to further illustrate the potential differences that might exist in parenting patterns and associated outcomes in different ethnic groups. Thus, an objective of the cultural specificity perspective was to understand different cultural groups on their own terms, which is an important part of countering the potential ethnocentric assumption that the norms and standards observed among middle-class European American families represent the ideal for other ethnic and social groups (Chao, 1994, 2001). The following four interrelated propositions define the cultural specificity perspective: (a) The values and socialization goals of parents in individualist and collectivist cultures differ, and therefore parents in different cultures engage in qualitatively different parenting; (b) the same parenting style (i.e.,

authoritarian parenting) has different effects on youths in different cultures; (c) children and adolescents in different cultures interpret the same parenting style in different ways; and (d) the emotional and cognitive characteristics of authoritarian parents differ in collectivist and individualist cultures.

### Values and Socialization Goals of Parents Differ

The most influential framework for understanding cultural differences in parenting styles is based on the notion that there are cultural differences in child-rearing values and goals (Rudy & Grusec, 2006). In the broadest sense, the distinction has been made between *collectivist* and *individualist* groups. Collectivists are said to value obedience, deference to authority, and duty or obligation to the group (Markus, 2008). Individualists are said to value independence, self-expression, and self-interest. Researchers have largely classified those of African, Asian, and Latin descent as more collectivist in orientation and those of European descent as more individualist in orientation (Triandis, 1995).

Several researchers have argued that variations in parenting styles and practices are due to variations in value systems. Chao (1994, 2001) has been a prominent proponent of this view, proposing that considering parents of Asian descent as authoritarian or restrictive is misleading. She argued that European American cultural philosophy cannot be used to understand parenting and child outcomes for children and adolescents of Asian descent. Chao (1994) proposed that Asian parenting grows out of the Confucian philosophy of role relationships. In particular, she argued that to understand Asian parenting, one must understand the concept of *training*, defined as *chiao shun* (i.e., parental investment and involvement) and *guan* (i.e., organizational control). Chao (1994) indicated that *chiao shun* and *guan* are qualitatively different from notions of control and responsiveness common in the West. For instance, she argued that unlike European American parents, most Asian parents do not explicitly display affection by hugging and kissing their children. Rather, they show their responsiveness implicitly by engaging in self-sacrifice. Chao also indicated that Asian parents apply organizational control, emphasize family honor, and demand hard work, self-discipline, and achievement. Thus, she argued that training explains Asian American students' academic performance in a way that the authoritative model does not.

To test this idea, Chao (1994) compared 50 highly educated and English-speaking Chinese immigrant mothers with 50 equally educated European American mothers on standard measures of responsiveness and control as well as on the concepts of *guan* and *chiao shun*. The Chinese mothers were significantly higher on measures of authoritarian parenting that focused on unilateral control, supervision, and control by anxiety. As she predicted, the Chinese mothers were much higher on traditional Asian beliefs about

child rearing. An interesting aspect of this finding is that these differences remained after she controlled for the mothers' scores on traditional measures of authoritarian parenting. Thus, she concluded that *guan* and *chiao shun* are qualitatively distinct from the responsiveness and demandingness dimensions used to describe parenting in individualist cultures.

In a follow-up study with a sample of 95 immigrant Chinese mothers and 52 European American mothers with the same demographics as in her first study, Chao (2000) assessed mothers on measures of parenting style, socialization goals, *chiao shun*, and school involvement. She essentially confirmed the results of her prior study and found that Chinese mothers were more likely to endorse authoritarian and training styles. She also found that European American mothers were more likely to focus on developing high self-esteem and self-expression in their children, whereas the Chinese mothers were more likely to focus on filial piety, family honor, and achievement.

Comparisons between Latino and European American parents have also found that Latino parents are more likely to value politeness and obedience (Smith & Krohn, 1995) and to focus on loyalty to family and respect for elders' authority (Valdes, 1996). Latino mothers also use more frequent discipline and physical guidance than European American mothers (Carlson & Harwood, 2003; Ispa et al., 2004). Some researchers have also suggested that achievement is less significant in Hispanic families than the quality of family and extended kin relationships (Forehand & Kotchick, 1996; Garcia Coll & Vasquez Garcia, 1995). However, it is important to note that Hispanic cultures are diverse, and variables such as country of origin, socioeconomic status, and parental education affect the emphasis that different Hispanic parents place on education relative to family and extended kin relationships (Garcia Coll & Pachter, 2002).

Similarly, Mandara and Murray (2002) argued that the different cultural values and social contexts in which African American parents live compared with European American parents have led to qualitatively different norms and standards for optimal parenting. They argued that one of the main differences is that most parents of color feel the need to preserve their cultural heritage and actively instill a sense of cultural pride in their children. To test this idea, Mandara and Murray assessed a sample of African American adolescents and their parents on a variety of parenting and family functioning variables. They then used various cluster-analytic and cross-validation procedures and uncovered three types of African American parents. Although the groups were similar to Baumrind's authoritative, authoritarian, and neglectful styles, they were also qualitatively different. The most unique group was called *cohesive-authoritative* because members displayed traditional authoritative parenting similar to Baumrind's notion and good quality family functioning. They were high in warmth, cohesion, achievement orientation, and autonomy granting. They were much higher on measures of behavioral control and structure than

authoritative parents but similar to the directive parents Baumrind (1971) identified. They were quite different from European American parents in their focus on instilling in their children a sense of cultural pride and a belief that they could overcome obstacles through self-reliance.

### The Same Parenting Style Has Different Effects in Different Cultures

A second point from the cultural specificity perspective is that the prevalence of a practice in a cultural group reflects its adaptive value in that specific ecological niche. Proponents of this hypothesis argue that because culture is defined as an adaptive system of rules and practices that are shared by a collective (Le Vine, 2009; Matsumoto & Juang, 2003), the prevalence of specific parenting practices or styles implies that it has become prevalent because of its value or functionality. Therefore, the implicit assumption is that authoritarian parenting style and practices will have more positive effects among those from collectivist than individualist cultures.

Several studies have directly or indirectly tested this hypothesis. In one of the more cited examples, Chao (2001) classified over 500 Chinese and European American parents of adolescents into either authoritative or authoritarian styles using the same measure and median split method from the earlier Steinberg et al. (1991) study. She further divided the Chinese Americans into first or second generation. The results showed that both groups of Chinese adolescents had higher GPAs and exhibited more school effort than the European American adolescents. Both Chinese groups were also more likely to have authoritarian parents but not less likely to have authoritative parents than the European American students. Most important, she found that the European American youths with authoritative parents had higher grades and school effort than their counterparts with authoritarian parents. There were no differences for first-generation Chinese American students from authoritative or authoritarian homes. The second-generation students were slightly higher in school effort when they had authoritative parents. She concluded that the authoritative versus authoritarian dichotomy may not have as much relevance for people from different cultures. However, as the Chinese American adolescents became more integrated into American society (as measured by generational status), the effects of authoritative parenting became similar to the effects for European Americans. Unlike in her previous study (Chao, 1994), authoritarian parenting included below-average involvement/acceptance, but authoritarian parenting was correlated with lower parent-child closeness only in European Americans, not in Chinese Americans (Chao, 2001, p. 1838).

A few studies have also found that controlling parental behavior may operate differently in Latino and European American families. A study with preadolescent European and Hispanic American children found that

controlling and hierarchical parenting predicted more externalizing behaviors among the European American children only (Lindahl & Malik, 1999). Ispa et al. (2004) studied cultural differences in the effects of maternal intrusiveness during young children's free play. They observed over 1,200 lower socioeconomic status infants interacting with their mothers at 15 months and again at 25 months. They found that European American mothers were less intrusive and warmer than African or Mexican American mothers. European American infants were also rated as having less negativity but similar task engagement at 15 months. They also found that maternal intrusiveness at 15 months was negatively related to child engagement and dyadic mutuality at 25 months for European American mothers only. Ispa et al. argued that intrusiveness likely has a different cultural meaning for African Americans and members of collectivist cultures than for individualistic cultures.

Undoubtedly, much of the evidence used to support the cultural specificity model has been based on findings suggesting that behavioral control, harsh discipline, and even physical punishment have differential effects for European American and African American youths. The main argument, proposed by several researchers (Baumrind, 1972; Mason, Cauce, Gonzales, & Hiraga, 1996; Ogbu, 1981) is that because many African American youths are reared in dangerous urban environments, they require higher levels of behavioral control and strictness to keep them from being victimized or engaging in risky activities. However, to fully assess the benefits of harsh discipline and "strict" parenting for different ethnic and socioeconomic groups, further research is needed to compare outcomes for African American children living in safe environments and European American children living in dangerous environments.

The evidence for cultural differences on the effect of parental control and supervision on youth delinquency is equivocal. For instance, Cernkovich and Giordano (1987) assessed 824 adolescents on various measures of parenting and delinquency involvement and found that although parental control and supervision was an important predictor of less delinquency for both White and non-White youths (who were primarily Black), instrumental communication (i.e., whether parents discuss adolescents' future plans or problems at school with friends and teachers) was the best predictor of lower delinquency for White youths, whereas control and supervision was the best predictor of lower delinquency for non-Whites.

Another group of researchers assessed the unique and longitudinal effects of supportive parenting and harsh discipline on various outcomes (Pettit, Bates, & Dodge, 1997) for 585 children and their parents with a battery of instruments before the start of kindergarten and once every year thereafter through the sixth grade. After they controlled for kindergarten adjustment measures, they found that harsh discipline was associated with poorer sixth-grade academic performance for European American youths

( $r = -.24$ ), but the association was in the opposite direction, although non-significant for African American youths ( $r = .11$ ).

Probably the most controversial topic in parenting research is the use and value of physical discipline as a form of punishment. Those rightly concerned with child abuse and infringements on the human rights of children argue that physical discipline is not only detrimental but also a form of child abuse (Straus, 2000). There are also some major researchers who argue that ordinary nonabusive spanking can be effective at preventing unwanted behaviors when used in a consistent and rational manner (Baumrind et al., 2002). Most studies with European American youths tended to support the antispanking perspective because physical discipline was associated with higher rates of aggressive behavior at home and school (Straus, 2000). The definition of harsh and corporal punishment varied, but it usually allowed overly severe physical punishment to be grouped with what most would consider ordinary spankings for misbehavior (Baumrind et al., 2002). Therefore, most of these studies did not assess the effects of ordinary nonabusive spanking.

Studies that also examined the effects among African Americans have often found results counter to those with European American youths. An early study by Deater-Deckard, Dodge, Bates, and Petit (1996) followed an economically diverse sample of African American and European American children from kindergarten to the third grade. As in the prior studies, physical discipline was positively associated with peer and teacher ratings of peer aggression, teacher-child conflict, and other disruptive behavior for the European American students. However, no significant association was found for the African American students. In a similar longitudinal study with a sample of 4- to 11-year-old African and European American children, spanking was associated with fewer fights at school and lowered general aggression for African American children (Gunnoe & Mariner, 1997). Likewise, McLoyd and Smith (2002) found that African American children who received high levels of maternal emotional support had fewer behavior problems across 6 years of assessments, whether or not they were spanked. Others have found similar results (Polaha, Larzelere, Shapiro, & Pettit, 2004). The researchers of each study concluded that like parenting styles in general, physical discipline may have a different meaning in African American families because of the prevalence of spanking in their communities.

In what is likely the largest study on the topic, Simons et al. (2002) used a sample of 841 families of 10- to 12-year-old African Americans to directly test the hypothesis that the effects of behavioral control and spanking depend on community characteristics. Behavioral control (e.g., monitoring, reasoning) was associated with fewer conduct problems in most neighborhoods but especially in those with higher deviancy rates. Conduct problems included shoplifting, fighting, lying, setting fires, and burglary. Spanking was

associated with more conduct problems only in neighborhoods where it was used rarely. The authors concluded that widespread acceptance of spanking in African American communities explains its differential effects on their children relative to European American children.

### **Children's Interpretations of the Same Parenting Style Differ in Different Cultures**

A third point from the cultural specificity perspective is that children in individualist and collectivist cultures interpret authoritarian parenting differently. Several researchers (Chao, 1994; Fung, 1999; McLoyd & Smith, 2002) have argued that children in collectivist cultures do not interpret authoritarian parenting as a sign of hostility and dominance, as do most children in individualistic cultures. In fact, such behaviors, especially when accompanied by beliefs of parental sacrifice or warmth, are more likely to be interpreted as a sign of parental care, concern, and involvement (Chao, 1994, 2001; McLoyd & Smith, 2002).

Only a few studies have directly tested this hypothesis. In probably the most cited study on the issue thus far, Mason et al. (2004) sampled 288 predominately urban high school students. The students rated four prototypical parental control items with 15 questions that asked them how they felt when their primary caregiver acts in this manner. Students also rated the actual levels of parental warmth and control they received. A factor analysis of each set of the 15 affective response items uncovered three factors for each. The authors found that after controlling for perceptions of actual warmth and parental control, African Americans were more likely than others to report that controlling through guilt ("Says if I really cared for her, I would not do things that cause her to worry") and general control ("Insists that I must do exactly as I'm told") were signs of love and concern. They were also less likely to say they were hurt or angered by such parental behaviors. However, no ethnic differences were found for students' affective responses to the enforcement item ("Is very strict with me"), which they viewed positively, not as feeling controlled and manipulated, or the intrusiveness item ("Wants to know exactly where I am and what I am doing"), which they viewed negatively as feeling controlled and manipulated.

### **Emotional and Cognitive Characteristics of Authoritarian Parents Differ by Culture**

Rudy and Grusec (2006) proposed that in individualist cultures, parents who hold collectivist values and practice authoritarian parenting are functioning in a way that is not considered appropriate or normative within their culture. Therefore, authoritarian parenting in individualist, but not in collectivist,

cultures is likely to represent negative parent characteristics. Some evidence supports Rudy and Grusec's (2006) proposition for those from individualist cultures. Carlson and Harwood (2003) found that parental control of infants was related to secure attachment among a small sample of Puerto Rican mothers but to avoidant attachment among European American mothers. Rudy and Grusec (2006) compared Anglo Canadians with Canadians of Egyptian, Pakistani, Indian, and Iranian origin. Consistent with their hypothesis, a significant negative association was found between authoritarian parenting and warmth for Anglo Canadians, but a nonsignificant association was found for the other groups. Therefore, evidence does suggest that some forms of parental control are less indicative of low nurturance and thus are interpreted differently by children and adolescents from collectivist versus individualist cultures.

### CULTURAL EQUIVALENCE PERSPECTIVE

Counter to the cultural specificity perspective, several other researchers have argued that the general features and premise of the authoritative model are consistent across cultural groups (Sorkhabi, 2005; Steinberg, 2001). According to this cultural equivalence perspective, for children to develop the universally important traits of self-control, concern for others, and a sense of agency, they all share the same fundamental needs for feeling loved, protected, and respected (Lamborn & Felbab, 2003). They also require guidance and structure until they are cognitively and emotionally mature enough to handle the demands of adulthood in their society. Thus, proponents of this perspective argue that the specific practices suggested by the authoritative model are important for all youths because they address these universal needs (Lamborn & Felbab, 2003). This basic premise and several studies led to the following four arguments counter to the cultural specificity perspective: (a) Values and socialization goals of parents in individualist and collectivist cultures are similar, and directive parenting as opposed to authoritarian parenting may better explain differences in prevalence of strict parenting in collectivist versus individualist cultures; (b) the same parenting style (i.e., authoritarian parenting) has the same effects on youths in different cultures; (c) children and adolescents in different cultures interpret the same parenting style in the same way; and (d) the emotional and cognitive characteristics of authoritarian parents in different cultures are the same.

#### **Directive Parenting and Cultural Similarities in Parenting Styles, Values, and Goals**

Baumrind's *directive* style could explain most of the inconsistencies in the research on non-European Americans. The directive style is exemplified

by a group of parents found in Baumrind's (1991a, 1991b) research who are similar to the authoritative style in amount and type of control but only moderate in nurturance and autonomy support. Their 10-year child outcomes are nearly equivalent to those of authoritative parents in Baumrind's own data (Baumrind, Larzelere, & Owens, 2010). Baumrind et al. (2010) elaborated on the dimensions that distinguish the directive parents and found that they are less likely to use unqualified power assertion, psychological control, verbal hostility, or arbitrary discipline than the authoritarian parents. In contrast to authoritative parents, directive parents were only average on responsiveness. They also had the same socialization goals of obedience and conformity as the authoritarian parents. Thus, the positive type of parenting observed in non-Europeans resembles the directive parenting style and not the authoritarian style, which we argue is universally harmful to children.

For instance, Chao's (1994, 2001) description of Asian parenting as highly demanding; moderately warm and nurturing; and holding strong values of obedience, politeness, family honor, and respect for authority is very similar to the directive style. This is also evident in the fact that although Chao (2000) found that Chinese Americans were higher on measures of training, a sizable portion of European American parents endorsed these principles, and both Chinese and European American parents who endorsed training did not differ significantly from one another in endorsing the socialization goals of filial piety and academic achievement.

Other studies also have tested the assumption that the parenting styles typology is universal. Several studies using cluster-analytic and other multivariate procedures to empirically classify families on the basis of their naturally occurring patterns found that the same basic styles emerge in different ethnic groups. For instance, Brenner and Fox (1999) assessed over 1,000 mothers of young children on three parenting factors and then subjected the scores to cluster-analytic procedures. They derived a four-group typology similar to Baumrind's parenting styles that was represented across different ethnic groups. They also found that authoritative parents were the most educated and least likely to report behavioral problems with their child. A more methodologically sophisticated study of inner city African and Mexican American adolescents used cluster analysis and found four parenting types similar to Baumrind's styles in both groups (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, Henry, & Florsheim, 2000). They labeled the four groups exceptionally functioning, task oriented, struggling, and moderately functioning. The exceptionally functioning parents were like those using Baumrind's directive style in that they were similar to the authoritative prototype, but they were less responsive (emotion focused) and more focused on discipline than the prototypical authoritative parents. Similarly, in the Mandara and Murray (2002) study, the cohesive-authoritative parents were also essentially using the directive style because

they exhibited all of the same traits as the prototypical authoritative style parents but were more discipline oriented and less responsive (acquiescent to child demands).

### **The Effects of Parenting Styles Are Similar in Collectivist and Individualist Cultures**

The cultural equivalence perspective proposes that the positive effects of authoritative parenting are similar across different cultural and ethnic groups. One concept that influences this perspective is that the balance between communion and agency in child behavior and reciprocity in parent–child interactions may be important and relevant in both individualist and collectivist cultures (Sorkhabi & Baumrind, 2009). As Sorkhabi and Baumrind (2009) indicated, agentic and independent behavior is necessary not only for child and adolescent initiative but also for compliance with parental directives and conformity to societal requirements. A certain level of self-reliance and independence is necessary for a child to do what is said to be valued in collectivist cultures, which is to serve the interests of other group members and to be a productive member of society. Therefore, it appears that children in both individualist and collectivist cultures may benefit from authoritative and directive parenting that does not undermine agency and promotes communion. However, permissive and authoritarian parents undermine both agency and communion because both kinds of parents do not engage in reciprocal interactions with the child that would encourage the child to think about the purpose of societal rules or requirements for adult conduct and to critically assess and differentiate between situations in which compliance and conformity are adaptive and in which dissent and disobedience are adaptive.

If one extrapolates the principle of reciprocity to explain the negative effects of authoritarian and permissive parenting and the positive effects of authoritative and directive parenting, it becomes evident that authoritarian and permissive parents violate that principle by failing to understand and accommodate their child's needs, abilities, and individuality. For example, authoritarian parents violate the principle of reciprocity by failing to reciprocate a child's bids for closeness (i.e., low warmth) and by discouraging verbal give-and-take. The child's viewpoint is certainly not solicited by the authoritarian parent and is actively discouraged by various means, including verbal hostility and excessive punishment. Similarly, permissive parents do not engage in sustained verbal give-and-take, and instead of punishing or becoming verbally hostile as authoritarian parents do, they simply disengage and accept the child's viewpoint but without appropriately accommodating or taking the child's viewpoint seriously, especially when the child disagrees or is being critical of the parent (Caughlin & Malis, 2004; Lichtwarck-Aschoff,

Kunnen, & van Geert, 2009). Authoritative and directive parents, although also confrontive when necessary, do not violate the principle of reciprocity because they use a set of practices that includes verbal give-and-take, demanding compliance in concert with reason and explanation, attending to the child's perspective, and in turn requiring the child to attend to the parents' perspective. Authoritative and directive styles should be optimal in both individualistic and collectivistic cultural contexts because the possibility of conflict and misunderstanding is minimized and informed action is maximized when both parties attend to and care about one another's perspective.

In support of this contention, in the parenting style studies by Dornbusch et al. (1987) and Steinberg et al. (1991, 1994), authoritative parenting was associated with the best mental health and fewest behavioral problems for youths of all ethnic backgrounds. Those studies simply did not find differences in GPAs between authoritative and authoritarian parents for some subgroups of African and Asian Americans. Evidence from several other studies pointed also to the beneficial effects of authoritative parenting for Asian children (Ang, 2006; Florsheim, 1997; Garg, Levin, Urajnik, & Kauppi, 2005; Kim & Gim Chung, 2003; Radziszewska, Richardson, Dent, & Flay, 1996). One of the more recent studies of 85 Chinese immigrant mothers found that endorsement of authoritative practices was positively associated with their children's self-regulation skills and better behavioral ratings from teachers (Cheah, Leung, Tahseen, & Schultz, 2009).

Other studies with African American youths have found similar positive effects of authoritative parenting on responsible conduct and mental health. A study with 108 African American mothers of young children found that authoritative parenting was a stronger predictor of good child behavior compared with authoritarian or permissive parenting, even after several socioeconomic factors were controlled (Querido, Warner, & Eyberg, 2002). Similarly, Mandara and Murray (2002) found that adolescents with authoritative-cohesive (directive) type of parents were significantly higher than their counterparts with authoritarian or neglectful parents on measures of mental health, self-esteem, and positive ethnic identity. These findings persisted after measures of socioeconomic and parental marital status were controlled. Gorman-Smith et al. (2000) found similar results for internalizing and externalizing behavior. Thus, consistent with the earlier parenting styles studies, virtually every study to date has shown that African and Asian American youths with authoritative or directive parents have significantly better behavior and mental health than youths without such parents.

Even in areas of achievement, some studies have found similar effects. Taylor, Hinton, and Wilson (1995) used a large national sample of 5- to 18-year-old African Americans and found that those whose parents used an authoritative style had higher grades than those with authoritarian or

permissive parents. Attaway and Bry (2004) found that African American mothers' beliefs in authoritarian control were negatively correlated with adolescent GPA. Gorman-Smith et al. (2000) found that African and Mexican American adolescents with exceptionally well functioning (i.e., directive) parents were higher over four waves on measures of educational aspirations and positive attitudes toward school compared with the others within their ethnic group. Thus, the existing evidence indicates that Baumrind's parenting model is applicable to youth outcomes in the domains of mental health, behavior, and achievement.

### **Authoritarian Parenting Is Interpreted Similarly in Collectivist and Individualist Cultures**

Another tenet of the cultural equivalence perspective is that authoritarian parenting is interpreted in similar ways by children in collectivist and individualist cultures. Proponents suggest that children in collectivist cultures interpret and evaluate the authoritarian parenting style negatively (Sorkhabi, 2005). The extant literature on children's evaluations and interpretations of authoritarian parenting and dimensions such as shaming, social comparisons, derogatory attributions, emphasis on family honor, and arbitrary curtailment of child autonomy reveals that children in collectivist cultures equate authoritarian parental control with parental rejection, hostility, and disconnection, not parental care, concern, and involvement. Furthermore, children's perception of authoritarian control is also positively related to familial and parent-child conflict and negatively related to harmony and cohesion, which are said to be central values in collectivist cultures. For example, Rohner and Pettengill (1985) found that Korean adolescents view authoritarian control as a sign of parental hostility and rejection and authoritative control as a sign of parental warmth and involvement. Similarly, Lau and Cheung (1987) found that high school students in Hong Kong who reported restrictive parental control that did not serve a rational purpose to structure and organize adolescent activities, consistent with authoritarian parenting, also reported more familial conflict.

Such authoritarian control is also negatively related to family harmony and cohesion. An interesting study by McNeely and Barber (2010) examined the spontaneous views of adolescents in many cultures (India, Bangladesh, China, Bosnia, Palestine, Germany, United States, Colombia, South Africa, and Australia) about parenting behaviors they thought constituted supportive, loving parenting. Adolescents provided 25 different behaviors that parents should and should not engage in to make them feel loved. The 25 behaviors were classified into emotional and companionate support, instrumental support, moral guidance and advice, allowing freedoms, and

showing respect or trust for the adolescent. McNeely and Barber found that 46% of adolescents in individualist and collectivist cultures reported that parental love and concern is evident in parental emotional and companionate support, including overt displays of physical affection, such as hugging and kissing. Adolescents also believed that parental control is a sign of parental love and support. However, adolescents distinguished between parental control that is punitive, such as parents yelling, hitting, straining, taxing, and stressing the adolescent either mentally or physically, versus control that is necessary and beneficial, such as parents giving the adolescent responsibilities or duties, disciplining or correcting the adolescent, providing guidance and advice, monitoring and setting limits, and worrying or being concerned about the adolescent's whereabouts and future. Therefore, there is some evidence that adolescents from a variety of cultures distinguish between punitive parental control and lack of responsiveness and affection that is consistent with the authoritarian parenting style and rational parental control and sufficient responsiveness and warmth consistent with authoritative and directive parenting styles.

### **Authoritarian Parenting in Both Individualist and Collectivist Cultures Is Associated With Negative Parental Emotional and Cognitive Characteristics**

Contrary to the cultural specificity perspective that authoritarian parenting in collectivist cultures is associated with positive parental emotional and cognitive characteristics, there is evidence that authoritarian parenting is associated with parental psychological distress and negative affect and negative family dynamics and interactions in individualist and collectivist cultures. Rudy and Grusec (2001) compared Egyptian Canadian and Anglo Canadian authoritarian parents on the dimensions of parental warmth, cognitive attributions regarding child misbehavior, and parental anger. They found, contrary to their hypotheses, that authoritarian parenting in both types of cultures was associated with anger and low warmth. Chang, Lansford, Schwartz, and Farver (2004) found that in Hong Kong authoritarian parenting was related to maternal psychological distress and depression and frequent marital conflict. Cheah et al. (2009) also found that Chinese immigrant mothers with greater psychological well-being, lower parenting stress, and high social support were more likely to be authoritative. Among Asian Indian mothers, Sharma, Sharma, and Yadava (2010) found that authoritarian parenting was significantly and positively related to maternal depression. Thus, several studies have shown that authoritarian parenting and its associated practices are related to negative emotional and economic situations for parents from most cultures.

## CONCLUSION

The bulk of the evidence indicates that Baumrind's four parenting styles typology of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and disengaged are represented in every cultural group assessed thus far. Once the directive style is included, the typology is an even better description of the diversity of styles among individualist and collectivist cultures. In fact, the evidence strongly suggests that the inclusion of the directive style will help clarify many of the inconsistencies in the parenting styles research on non-European Americans. The field may need to move beyond the four parenting styles typology and begin incorporating the directive and possibly other styles. The incorporation of the entire range of parenting styles including the directive style would be useful to identify the diverse forms of parenting within cultures so as to more effectively explain within-culture differences in child outcomes and to make more accurate and delineated comparisons between cultures. It would also be fruitful to examine parental goals and values in relation to the range of parenting styles, especially the authoritarian and directive styles, in different cultures.

After reviewing the evidence, it is abundantly clear that the positive effects of authoritative and directive parenting are strong and robust for every cultural group studied thus far. Youths with authoritative or directive parents, regardless of ethnic background, are better off in virtually every domain researchers have measured, even after family demographic factors are accounted for. However, another finding is that certain non-European American groups, particularly African and Asian Americans, are not as negatively impacted by strict parenting as are European American youths. This finding was apparently wrongly interpreted by many researchers to mean that authoritarian parenting is optimal for certain groups. Furthermore, the methodology used by the cultural equivalence view appears to be sounder than the cultural specificity perspective in that researchers who emphasize cultural equivalence have used more objective outcome measures (e.g., official school grades, sociometric peer and teacher reports) as well as more reliable and valid measures of parenting styles that match Baumrind's operationalization of the parenting styles. Also, shared source variance (i.e., data for the independent and dependent variables being obtained from the same source) is less of a problem for the cultural equivalence than the cultural specificity perspective.

Future research is needed to assess whether the optimal style for most collectivist groups is the pure authoritative style Baumrind originally described or alternatively the directive style, which emerged from her research with a European American sample as well as from analyses of different samples by other researchers. Future research should examine variability in parenting styles within cultures in relation to developmental outcomes so that different

cultures are not homogenized by a focus on between-group comparisons that may inaccurately draw conclusions about the prevalence of a particular parenting style from study samples.

On the basis of this review, we conclude that children from collectivist cultures, like those from individualist cultures, distinguish between authoritarian control that is punitive, arbitrary, and intrusive versus directive and authoritative control that is nonpunitive, rational, and accommodative of child individuality. Emotional closeness or responsiveness, however, may have culturally specific components. Displays of physical affection are not the only way for parents to express love or develop close emotional bonds with their children. More research is needed to examine how adolescents in different cultures evaluate and interpret the differences among authoritarian, directive, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles and the effects that variations in interpretation have on developmental outcomes. However, regardless of how specific cultural groups define and express responsiveness, the fundamental premise of the authoritative model that children need to feel loved, respected, and firmly guided while they are maturing into adults seems to be true for all children.

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